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THE SITUATION IN CENTRAL AMERICA: PROCEDURES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FIRM AND LASTING PEACE AND PROGRESS IN FASHIONING A REGION OF PEACE, FREEDOM, DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT

Letter dated 25 March 1996 from the Secretary-General addressed to the President of the General Assembly

I wish to bring to your attention the enclosed statements by the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and the Government of Guatemala, which were issued on 19 and 20 March 1996 respectively (see annexes I and II). URNG agreed, as a contribution to progress in the peace process, to suspend temporarily offensive military operations against military barracks, detachments and installations and troop movements on the roads, and the Government announced that, in response to URNG's decision, President Alvaro Arzú was issuing instructions to the Army to cease counter-insurgency operations.

These decisions are very positive developments which augur well for the continuation of the peace negotiations and the conclusion of a comprehensive peace agreement. They will alleviate the suffering of the civilian population, a goal to which both parties are committed under the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights signed in March 1994. They will also build further upon the sense of mutual confidence that has characterized the relationship between the Government of President Arzú and URNG, and thus help to create a climate conducive to the consolidation of democratic change in Guatemala.

As stressed in my report of 16 February 1996 (A/50/881) to the General Assembly on the renewal of the mandate of the United Nations Mission for the Verification of Human Rights and of Compliance with the Commitments of the Comprehensive Agreement on Human Rights in Guatemala (MINUGUA), measures recently taken by the Government of Guatemala and URNG have led to a strengthening of the rule of law and a gradual demilitarization of political life in that country. The decisions announced yesterday by URNG and the Government are praiseworthy new steps in that direction.

As you are aware, the Government of Guatemala and URNG are currently engaged in complex negotiations on social and economic issues. Both parties agree that a broad agenda of social and economic progress is a necessary component of a lasting peace. On that basis, I consider that favourable conditions exist for bringing the negotiations on that important issue to a fruitful conclusion. I will continue to do my utmost to facilitate that process and I hope that the round of negotiations to be held next week in Mexico City will bring concrete results.

In a statement issued on 21 March 1996, I congratulated the parties on the significant step forward which they had taken. I take this opportunity to reiterate to the States Members of the United Nations my invitation to them to increase their support for the Guatemala peace process and, in particular, their support for MINUGUA, whose activities are, in the view of both parties, critical to the success of this historic endeavour.

I should be grateful if you would bring the contents of the present letter and its annexes to the attention of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Boutros BOUTROS-GHALI

ANNEX I

[Original: Spanish]

A substantive contribution to the negotiations and to peace - Statement by the General Command of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca

The General Command of URNG takes a positive view of the fact that the negotiating process for peace in our country has been renewed under circumstances of mutual trust between the parties. At the conclusion of the recent round of negotiations, the commitment to fulfil the agreements already signed, keep the agenda intact and respect the Framework Agreement of January 1994 was reaffirmed. This constitutes an important basis for continuing the negotiating process.

The General Command wishes to make a substantive contribution to advancing the peace process. Accordingly, it agrees temporarily to suspend offensive military operations, attacks on military barracks, detachments and installations and troop movements on the roads. The military units of URNG will go into combat and repel any type of aggression or attack by the Army. The political and propaganda activities being conducted by our guerrilla units are not being suspended.

ANNEX II

[Original: Spanish]

Press release by the Government of Guatemala dated 20 March 1996

The Government of Guatemala, in response to national and international public opinion, expresses its satisfaction at the statement by the General Command of URNG that it will temporarily suspend offensive military operations, attacks on military barracks, detachments and installations and troop movements on the roads.

For his part, the President of the Republic has issued instructions to the Guatemalan Army that, in response, it will cease its counter-insurgency operations and engage solely in the activities corresponding to its constitutional mandate.

The Government of Guatemala considers that the foregoing reaffirms the mutual trust between the parties that characterizes the current phase of the negotiations, and reiterates its commitment to achieve as soon as possible a negotiated political solution to the internal armed confrontation, in order to strengthen the building of a firm and lasting peace.